

Making Sense of Aboriginal Education in Canadian Public Schools: A Case Study of Four Inner City Elementary Principals and Their Vision of Aboriginal Education

Myra Laramée

Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre

Aboriginal education is a concept that may be characterized by the currency of its usage than any consensus as to its meaning and practice. In both historical and contemporary contexts, many of these ambiguities relate to the diversity of peoples and contexts subsumed by the term *Aboriginal*, the multiple and shifting notions of what it means to be educated, and the relationship between the purposes of public schools in Canada and Aboriginal education. Embedded within the discourse of Aboriginal education are at least three conceptually distinct sets of meaning: 1) the education of Aboriginal students, 2) education that is about Aboriginal worldviews, cultures and experiences, and 3) educational purposes and practices that reflect Aboriginal values and aspirations. At times, these meanings may be woven together and at other times may stand in sharp oppositions to one another, depending on the context in which such meanings are applied. This study attempted to examine the concept of Aboriginal education as it is understood and articulated by four urban, inner city elementary school principals and the various ways in which they see it being put into practice in their schools. This study revealed that the vision for Aboriginal Education was influenced by the expectations found in provincial, divisional and district policy and priorities; these influences provided the foundational path for the administrators to make their footprints in Aboriginal Education.

INTRODUCTION: PRE-CONTACT TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGY

Indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of learning prior to contact were grounded in the very land that the First Peoples inhabited. Three Laws of Relationship (Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, 2000) guided the interactions of most Indigenous peoples of the land. The Law of Relationship with the self, the Law of Relationship with nature

and the Law of Relationship with the land guided the behaviour of learning and living. Essential to this concept was the notion that relations were of the utmost importance. Also essential to this concept was the notion that learning through looking, listening, learning, and living was the pedagogical typology for all learning. One did not acquire knowledge without understanding that whatever knowledge was transmitted had purpose and meaning in the maintenance of balance in all social and spiritual relations. Understanding was realized by practicing the knowledge acquired in daily life. When someone had demonstrated knowledge through effective living, it was recognized by others. Through the demonstration of such understanding and application of knowledge, that individual earned the right to teach what had been learned; in this way, constant learning and healing would take place amongst Aboriginal people. The goal of any learning transaction was to strengthen the reciprocity of knowledge acquisition across all age groups (Western Canadian Protocol in Basic Education, 2000).

Aboriginal education as a Eurocentric vision has been enacted in various forms in Canada since the late nineteenth century. This has been most prevalent at the level of the Canadian Federal Government and its targeting of Aboriginal children in the residential school process; targeting of Aboriginal children for educational purposes has also taken place at the provincial level in public schools (Battiste, 2000; Bouvier and Ward, 2001; Castellano, 2000; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People [RCAP], 1996). The residential school process, with its targeting of Aboriginal children, served as a means for government authorities to enact assimilation and segregation processes in an attempt to civilize Aboriginal children (Haig-Brown, 1988; Grant, 1996; York, 1990; Miller, 1996; RCAP, 1996). In reflecting this sentiment, Boldt (1993) stated, "The accumulated effect of the Canadian Government's Indian policies was to inflict massive devastation on Indian cultures. Forced assimilation resulted in a systematic destruction of cultural patterns, beliefs and social and normative systems and structures, incurring cultural voids" (p.172). It was this attempt to enact Aboriginal education through federal assimilation policies that separated the Aboriginal learner from others and from their families and communities. Not only did this segregation eradicate knowledge of the richness in Indigenous language and culture for the Aboriginal students but served to rob the rest of Canadian society of their gifts (Bouvier and Ward, 2001).

This history has resulted in a damaging impact for Aboriginal students in terms of their academic achievement and their Aboriginal identities (Battiste, 2000; Grant, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988; RCAP, 1996; York, 1990). Furthermore, it is damaging to non-Aboriginal students because it denies them access to a rich dimension of Canadian history and culture and reinforces stereotypical and racist attitudes and behaviours (Grant, 1996; RCAP, 1996). A void of knowledge about the realities of Aboriginal peoples' lives, traditions, contributions, beliefs and worldviews has been created in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Canada. In place of these realities, misconceptions, stereotypes and misinformation has been allowed to develop; these developments have impacted on the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners.

The social segregation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners in schools has created a gap in knowledge for both sets of learners; both sets of learners who have been influenced from a dominant set of educational structures and philosophies that have rested on Eurocentric values and worldviews. This gap has only begun to be challenged in the last three decades (Bouvier and Ward, 2001). Although it was through the residential school system that an intergenerational void of traditional knowledge was developed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada (Castellano, 2000), the Eurocentric provincial system contributed to maintaining this void. During the last two decades, due to such developments as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (1996), social advancements have challenged all involved in Aboriginal education and initiatives to deconstruct the vision of Eurocentric education systems have emerged. These developments were influenced by research and writing by Aboriginal scholars, public acknowledgement and apologies for atrocities committed in the residential schools, and the 1998 announcement by the Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2003).

While responsibilities for educating Aboriginal children had, by the mid-twentieth century, shifted to a provincial public education process, the delivery of education to all children in this system was designed from a Eurocentric mind set (Battiste, 1998; Battiste, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Castellano, 2000; Hampton, 1995; Bouvier and Ward, 2001). Battiste (1998) stated that "in effect, the curricula serve as another colonial instrument to deprive Aboriginal communities of their knowledge, languages, and cultures" (p.1). In the pro-

vincial school system, this was generally evidenced either by an absence of any acknowledgement of an Aboriginal place or voice in the curriculum, or of stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal people and cultures and a presence positioned only in relation to European history, interests, and perspectives (Castellano, 1999; Hampton, 1995). Much of the public education system in Canada remains Eurocentric and continues to perpetuate the assimilation process started with the residential school era (Battiste, 1998). In this way, public schooling has continued to eradicate the ways of living, speaking and learning which typify Aboriginal people as significant to the fabric of Canadian society.

This article reports a study that examined the concept of Aboriginal education as it is understood and articulated by four urban, inner city elementary school principals and the various ways in which they see it being put into practice in their schools. These four school principals, all of whom work in the Winnipeg School Division, have voiced concern about contemporary Aboriginal education practices and have asserted a desire to re-examine such practices with the hope of stimulating educational change.

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the vision of Aboriginal education held by four Inner City public school administrators. This study employed an interview process for data acquisition. The four participants were principals in the Winnipeg School Division's Inner City District. The researcher devised interview items that would encourage the participants to describe the ways in which they made sense of the term *Aboriginal education* and how they saw it operationalized in their school. The development of the interview items was governed by the following research questions:

- 1.) How do inner city school principals articulate their understanding of the concept of Aboriginal education?
- 2.) How do these administrators see their vision of Aboriginal education being put into practice in the school that they work in?

This study utilized a data collection process involving a set of interviews where each participant was interviewed twice. The identities of the participants and schools have been kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms.

The participant sample consisted of principals from the Winnipeg School Division, a division that was, in 2006, comprised of 79 schools, servicing approximately 35,000 students. The student population of the participants' schools comprised a multitude of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, both Canadian born and immigrant, as well as the largest intertribal student population of Aboriginal students in Canada in any urban setting.

Each participant took part in two interviews of approximately one hour each. In the first interview, attention was focused participant understandings of Aboriginal education and the ways in which it was being put into practice in their schools. In the second interview, the focus of the discussion was on the ways in which administrators perceive Aboriginal education in their school as being a reflection of the Inner City District.

Each interview was transcribed, producing approximately 50 pages of text. After several readings of each transcript, each segment of interview was assigned a descriptive "concept label"; these labels were then clustered into themes relevant to the study's research questions.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data in a process of theme identification. The established themes illustrated how each of the participants developed an understanding of Aboriginal education as a concept and how it might look in their schools. The following will not represent a comparative evaluation or assessment of the administrators and their schools, but rather a reflection of commonalities and highlights of their understandings of Aboriginal education and differences in the participants' respective approaches to the issue. This discussion will include how the administrators perceived their work in the context of school and of their divisions.

FINDINGS

The researcher established four themes from the data acquired:

- 1.) The development of a vision of Aboriginal education,
- 2.) Aboriginal education as inclusive and holistic,
- 3.) A whole school perspective on Aboriginal education, and
- 4.) Aboriginal education as a capacity-building agenda.

The first theme represented the relationship between the lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people in Canadian society and the need for capac-

ity building in the transmission of knowledge to all learners in the field of Aboriginal education. The second theme illustrated the recognition amongst the participants of the struggle described by the administrators' encounter to imbibe a vision of Aboriginal education in their schools as well as the acknowledgement of the gains they feel they have made. The third theme that was prevalent throughout the interviews related to the descriptions of the conditions required to develop a vision of Aboriginal education within a public school context. The fourth theme, perhaps the most prevalent theme amongst the participants, was associated with the universal nature of the Indigenous philosophical framework for life and living.

Theme 1

Each administrator articulated a notion that the process of developing their vision of Aboriginal education was an ongoing and evolving process that involved a blending of their own personal life experiences, school division policy, and their professional work as educators. Their comments also tended to be contextualized to the specifics of their particular school setting and emphasized the importance of their vision being one that could be shared and owned by their staff. Illustrative of this, Lara commented, "[My vision] comes from the policy that has been developed by the Winnipeg School Division. It also comes from my experience; my own personal experience with Aboriginal education throughout the years."

Each administrator in this study had quite different backgrounds, and each identified personal experiences as important in their development of a vision of Aboriginal education. Nathalie's experiences growing up as an ethnic minority of European ancestry in a small town in rural Manitoba close to a number of First Nations communities had a significant impact on her journey into education and her understandings of Aboriginal education. She stated, "I would have to say that [developing a vision of Aboriginal education] had to do with doing a self-evaluation and evaluating the prejudices and biases that I have as a result of where I come from." Gladys' critical stance to schooling and anti-racist education was central to her vision of Aboriginal education, and she commented:

I've always been involved and come from an ideological framework concerned with inequities in our society. So social justice and what has happened to marginalized groups of people as a passion of mine, because you know....I am a woman of colour

who has come into a system and my own personal experiences and the challenges I have faced have just made me stronger in terms of pursuing what I believe is a place for children – Aboriginal children, all children to achieve.

Each of the participants articulated that their vision was influenced by the expectations found in provincial and divisional policy. All of the participants relied on divisional Aboriginal education policy and felt its availability was an asset. Each participant cited the provincial expectations, priorities, and supporting documents as they related to Aboriginal education as tools that they utilized to develop a well rounded vision of Aboriginal education with their staffs. The participants also felt that it was important to make these tools known to their staffs in an effort to encourage the perception of a school that emphasized cooperation and the existence of a shared vision. The participants were careful to explain in their own way that taking the time with their staff, parents and community were important steps that would facilitate the embracing of the vision of Aboriginal education for each of their schools.

Lara explained that she “looked at the policy...looked at what the province has told us [is Aboriginal education] and...the Native Studies documents” and that these documents influenced her own development as well as in the development of a common vision with her staff. Lara illustrated the importance of her vision being one that is developed collaboratively and shared with her school staff:

I know that for me, it has to be something that is owned by everybody. I mean I could have my own vision myself of what I would like my school to look like, but that would just be my vision...and it would be very difficult for my staff to have any commitment to that vision whatsoever.

Expanding on this sentiment, Natalie indicated that she “had a real difficult time with understanding what Aboriginal education is” and “really didn’t understand ...until” she went to the summer institute on Aboriginal education to find “an understanding of what Aboriginal education is.” She described her experience as “utilizing what we know from the power of things from the Aboriginal culture and background to ensure that we’re meeting the various [learning] styles of the children in our schools.” Natalie has been able to share this deepened understanding with her staff and developed the knowledge to ensure her staff understands “that if there’s anything

that we can gain from....what [she knows] about Aboriginal education”, it’s that we can “utilize that to reach” the goal of meeting the needs of students in our schools.

Judy, on the other hand, feels that the work of the Inner City District Aboriginal Education Committee has been able to work with the vision in her school. She felt that “we have really come a long way in the last ten years. We have established guidelines and a philosophy and I think everybody is comfortable doing Aboriginal education without having to question, ‘why am I doing this?’” In Judy’s school:

The aim is to continue fine-tuning it as we get feedback or as we try things that work or don’t work. That’s our process of doing things. We make a plan. We work on it. We ask for feedback and we fine-tune as we go along....Aboriginal education, the philosophy behind Aboriginal education is one of the ways in meeting the needs of our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Judy felt that this work has deeply influenced her own philosophy and clarified her work with her staff. As Judy asserted, “It’s the way we think. It’s what we do. It’s our expectations”.

In order to develop their personal visions, each participant referenced their own belief system as an influence for how they came to understand the need for a committed, collaborative and inclusive approach to move forward the agenda in Aboriginal education. When Lara shared her personal experiences related to learning, she emphasized that “as learners...we are learners forever, and throughout our lifetime we develop as life-long learners.” Lara spoke of her own development as a learner, stating that she needed “more experience” and “more exposure” related to the tenets of Aboriginal education and teachings; she is careful to embrace a “process where [she] can encourage the development of staff in the whole vision of Aboriginal education.” Lara felt that there were “so many different pieces or facets of Aboriginal education” that she needs the process she uses with her staff to be developed incrementally.

Each of the participants articulated that their vision of Aboriginal education was developed from a variety of sources and each was somewhat different from the other. The participants also felt that in helping others come to embrace a vision of Aboriginal education, they had to rely on resources from the province, division, district as well as what was in their individual

schools. This particular field of education is relatively new to many and Lara characterized the struggle by emphasizing that Aboriginal education “is a process that will take a long time to develop.” She hoped that her staff would take the Principles of Aboriginal Education adopted by the Inner City District to:

Help children understand and then act upon [them] as they move forward toward a better and deeper understanding [of the Seven Teachings]” and believed that “we can accomplish this through the dialogue we have with one another, with our students, with our parents and community.

Theme 2

Within the public education system in Canada, the ideals and images of meritocracy and the common school in which children from all walks of life operate, learn about, and respect one another, have deep roots. While the limitations that prevent the school system to live up to this ideal for many students - especially Aboriginal students - has been well documented, it remains an enduring ideal, and this was a prevalent theme among the participants.

The participants asserted that Aboriginal education must not only be inclusive of all students in the Winnipeg School Division, but have further stated that Aboriginal education must also be for their staff, parents, guardians, and the community of each of their schools. Lara was emphatic that “Aboriginal education is for absolutely everybody, everyone on this North American continent...it should apply to everyone.” Lara believed that Aboriginal education is not just for Aboriginal children. She explained that:

Historically, no one [having attended public schools] has been taught Aboriginal education and Aboriginal people themselves...not everyone knows what has happened in the past in the Aboriginal community because they [Aboriginal people] have been influenced by an education system that basically wrote them off and stuck them in a corner and didn't want anybody to know anything about them. They [the Canadian Government] basically put Aboriginal people on a shelf and they...didn't pay any attention to the fact that these people are here...they are right in everybody's back yard and everybody needs to understand that they can contribute just like everybody else to society.

All of the participants believed that Aboriginal education should be available for all students. Natalie stated that Aboriginal education in her

school “is quality education for all children.” While Gladys also agreed that Aboriginal education ought to include everyone, she emphasized her belief about the importance of Aboriginal education for Aboriginal children by suggesting that Aboriginal children should be exposed to Aboriginal education because of the past historical experiences.

Each of the participants echoed the notion that Aboriginal people have been marginalized by the education systems in Canada. Gladys asserted this by stating that “Aboriginal people have not got the kind of education that they should be and are entitled to due to historical reasons.” The participants felt that Aboriginal education is multi-faceted and layered and the work to bring this to light in the eyes of the people in their schools must be organized and methodical. They also have indicated that this work will take time. Each also felt that the relations amongst Canadians in general would be enhanced by participating in an Aboriginal education agenda. Lara most clearly explained this idea:

Aboriginal education needs to be for everyone so that everyone understands where Aboriginal people are coming from, their perspective, what they have been through, what Aboriginal people have lived through and experienced not only for themselves, but the whole intergenerational effect, what has happened as a result of residential school.

Lara made it very clear that “everyone needs to know about them [Aboriginal people] in order to understand the place of Aboriginal people today in our society. She reiterates that “everybody needs to know about it [the historical events]”.

Theme 3

The participants involved in this study referenced a number of common key concepts that need to be considered and/or applied when considering how Aboriginal education processes are enacted in each of their schools. They each talked about the need for staff to develop a clear vision of Aboriginal education and take active involvement in the action plans. Collaboration and ownership of these plans was perceived as crucial for Aboriginal education to be integrated across school functions and in all matters of curriculum implementation. Each participant spoke to the notion that Aboriginal education practices being evidenced in all facets of school life.

Each participant cited different examples of influences that would affect the development of equity in knowledge and the adoption of the Seven Teachings, such as provincial education mandates, school division policy and the consistent prioritization of Aboriginal education. With these influences in mind, the participants had each developed a course of action in their schools to make sure that the goals of the province, division and district are linked to the preparation of their staffs, students and community, the action plans and strategies adopted in each of their schools, as well the processes of integration and community involvement.

When considering the lack of knowledge in mainstream consciousness regarding Aboriginal people and their lifestyles and perspectives, it is important to note that most school staff have had little or no training in this particular field of education. Consequently, the preparation for such work will be multifaceted and include a variety of options for staff, students and community to acquire tools to implement strategies that they can actually begin to use. As Lara comments:

We have done in-services on the Seven Teachings [and] we have done discussions on the Principles of Aboriginal Education [and] we have developed a handbook for our teachers.... it's a living document so it's always changing so that the teachers can use it.

The participants asserted that in order for staff to be able to implement strategies in Aboriginal education, they must first need to be involved in forums of knowledge and developmental experience to ensure the expectations set out in any vision of Aboriginal education might be fulfilled respectfully and with confidence. Lara asserted that the preparatory work that she does with her staff to make sure that they have the resources for Aboriginal education explores the different sorts of people encouraging this agenda in classrooms; examples such as these serve as cogent models for best practice. It is through her professional development activities that Lara found commitment for her plans. Lara stated that she encourages her staff to take risks and to speak their mind. Other participants made it clear that Aboriginal education is an expectation and worked closely with their staff to establish how Aboriginal education should be manifest in their school.

Judy had a different approach to preparing her staff for enactment of an Aboriginal education program. She encouraged staff to attend division workshops which were facilitated by school division consultants and cultur-

al support staff. She felt that it was important to not only receive help from the district, but she felt that:

Teachers go to the sessions that are being offered by the division to help them continue to grow as adults and as educators so that they can then be better equipped to impart that information to children and use those strategies with children.

Judy had “moved beyond policy” and began a journey with her staff in a series of workshops and professional development activities which encouraged input and ownership of a common understanding; decisions were being made in her school regarding how Aboriginal education might look.

Gladys, on the other hand, had facilitated similar activities to those of the other participants, but had evoked an anti-racist approach with have staff in order to examine the power base that they hold in the school and in the classroom. She commented:

In order to get to that place, it means that we have to look at all of those pieces, the curriculum, the staffing, the requirements, the relationship between community [and the school]...all those pieces. The other piece that we have is education; staff development and having teachers look at all of the historical pieces that I mentioned. It means working in partnerships with the community. So I've said [in my school] that Aboriginal education has been a priority for seven years and will continue to be so because we are not at the place that we ought to be at.

When each of the participants spoke about how Aboriginal education looked in each of their schools, they were all consistent in the expectation that Aboriginal education should be moved to a place where it is seen, heard, felt and lived across all areas of the learning environment and throughout the facets of their school's operations. One spoke of school climate, another spoke of school plans, while yet another spoke of methodologies. The development of guiding resource materials like Lara's Seven Teachings handbook and the arrangement of assemblies focusing on one teaching at a time, or Natalie's use of the same teachings to facilitate a whole school character education program were examples of how Aboriginal perspectives were used as universal tools across school wide strategies.

Gladys indicated that, “We've moved away from that [one shot activities] and saying that we need that vision embedded across the curriculum”, while Natalie shared that:

What I do see in terms of Aboriginal education is like I said earlier...the Seven Teachings being foremost because those are our core values and we

want to instill those in our children to make them successful learners and successful people in society. And so I see that happening in every classroom and I hear conversations happening on the playground through my window.

Theme 4

There is a unique feature of Aboriginal education that has been shaped by virtue of its absence from Canadian society's popular consciousness, an absence that has been prevalent in mainstream education systems. In regard to developing a vision and process for Aboriginal education, the participants suggested that it is necessary for all learners in education systems to be active participants with community resources to enhance the learning environments in schools everywhere in this province in order to rectify this omission. The participants in this study have been very thorough in their description of the ways in which they are attempting to fill the voids of knowledge in their schools.

Involvement of Aboriginal people in the learning community has required the participants in this study to refrain from making assumptions about the people in question. Instead, the participants felt that they should attempt to learn from the parents and resource people regarding how they would like to significantly involve themselves in the school's learning community. Judy suggested that the involvement of Aboriginal people in this learning community is an evolutionary process that must be respectful. Judy experienced success with the strategy of asking parents for their input to school plans for Aboriginal education and stated that:

It's very exciting to see our kids being more connected. I see our adults reaching out to all students and that personal connection is keeping them in school. The fact that they want to be here is because of those personal connections that we've made that are open in terms of acceptance. I think our approach in dealing with Aboriginal education has already shown us that we are on the right track. And our kids are feeling comfortable with that. I see our parents being much more open in terms of coming in and talking and expressing their concerns. So I see it as really exciting.

Lara has taken the approach of involving her community support worker as a facilitator to help coordinate learning events for parents and community. Lara's community support worker had set up workshops on a variety of different topics that the parents have identified in a survey. When parents

requested more information, Lara organized 14 of those workshops last year. Lara explained:

They weren't attended as well as we thought they should be. We figured that it was a couple of things, one was, they were held during the day and that just those aren't the parents that wanted to know. So because 59% our parents work, they work some portion of the day so we have to look at making opportunity available in the morning, at lunch, after school and in the evening.

Each participant affirmed the challenge to inclusion. Lara explained it well when she embraced the challenge by asserting that Aboriginal education is an evolutionary process and made clear that all participants in this Aboriginal education learning community have a relationship of interdependence. She explained:

I think that you can evolve as a staff. You evolve as a person and that's what the Seven Teachings are about. It's an evolution over time. It's not like this is the way it is right now. I mean it may be that way right now, but two years from now it looks very, very different. And that's what the beauty of this is, is that it's a document that allows people to evolve. And different schools are going to evolve at different rates. It's depends on staff. It depends on the orientation of the leadership. It depends on what the district is saying, you know, the support that you're getting in order to move in a certain direction. It depends on what is happening in the city. There [are] lots of different influences that push and pull, but because this is a document that says that we all develop at different rates and we're doing things at different rates and that's a good thing, not a bad thing. All of us develop differently. And that's basically how the document supports the idea, in my mind, that it's an evolving [process].

Each administrator was adamant that Aboriginal education must include all participants in every facet of Manitoba's education system. Judy explained that in her mind, "It encompasses the teacher as a learner, the student as a learner, and that we are learning together. There's a community of learners where Aboriginal education takes in integral place".

The points that appeared to be the easiest for the participants to make was about the children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, as integral members of the learning community; members who can facilitate the collaboration of all learners in their schools to help the adults find their significant place in the learning process called Aboriginal education. Gladys stated that she had used a strategy that seems to be working; she explained that one of her three key priorities in her school was community involvement:

We have a family resource centre and family resource centre coordinator right in the school. And so that has really proven to make parents an integral part [of the learning community]. The Aboriginal staff development [TA Intern Program] has been a big part. The fact that we've had the priority....building that promise [creates] a real sense of authenticity. The fact that we've had a lot of traditional teachings that go on in the school has a huge impact. Like a parent actually made the drum we currently use and we have our own school drum that was given to us....all of those things, the people [and] the children [having] active roles in this system.

Making all of the people in their schools feel like they are part of a community of learners has certainly proven to be multi-faceted and has layer upon layer of involvement. The ways in which each of the participants described their own set of strategies (i.e. the layers) are site-based and particular to each of the individual schools' staff, parents, students, elders and other members of their community of learners.

DISCUSSION

In order to create space in schools for a vision in Aboriginal education, school administrators should take time to do preparatory work in an effort to engage staff in their vision. The data acquired in this study suggests that the school climate necessary to develop a shared vision should allow for the occurrence of constructive discussion and mutual collaboration. Furthermore, this process should be carried out while acknowledging that the work is developmental; creating a vision can be a lengthy process that requires patience. In order for these capacity building endeavours to filter throughout the school, the learning community should have an active role in the process. If the strategies described in this study can be utilized within schools and the people in them, palpable organizational change can take place. The data acquired in this study suggests that the commitment to realizing a vision for Aboriginal education and a plan for its implementation requires collaboration with the school-based and community-based stakeholders. Such collaboration should involve developing ways to respectfully engage others while preparing some to carry out the vision's action plan when necessary.

An implication of this study is that children in schools have the opportunity to interact with one another in more meaningful ways that are congruent with the tenets of traditional Aboriginal relations. In regard to teachers, tenable Aboriginal education programmes that are solidified by administrative support will allow them to manage achievable outcomes within their

schools. The school community and community partners should have the opportunity to experience genuine involvement in their school's learning community through contribution and collaboration. There should be careful consideration for the maintenance and sustained integrity of the sacred laws, teachings and practices which would be embedded in mainstream school settings and classrooms. The concern for the preservation of these ancestral tools need recognition and must not be misused or misrepresented; such treatment may result in the dissolution to their strength as tools for life and living found in Indigenous epistemology.

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Myra Laramée is a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation. Myra is a grandmother, mother, sister, and daughter and has been an educator for 32 years serving as a teacher, counselor and administrator. Myra is currently a Curriculum Writer at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. A graduate student in an Ad Hoc Interdisciplinary PhD Program at the University of Manitoba, Myra's research will be in Indigenous Knowledge, pedagogies and traditional teaching tools as they are related to teacher education. My dissertation will be titled "We Teach and You Learn as an Act of Love."